

CHAPTER 4

Durham

from City of the New South

existing Conditions

*“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and test of our civilization.”
- Mahatma Gandhi*

Existing Land Use Mix

An inventory and analysis of existing conditions was conducted to provide a better understanding of the planning context for the master plan. The data collected included an analysis of the existing land use, buildings, traffic and circulation, and general development trends. A detailed land use inventory, shown in the *Existing Land Use* map on the following page, was prepared using the City's Geographic Information System (GIS). This inventory reflects ground floor uses only. Documentation of the use of upper floor space was recorded wherever possible; however, this information is not considered as accurate as first floor data. Downtown offers a variety of uses ranging from housing to office and warehousing. In addition to these traditional private uses, Downtown Durham is the center for both City and County government operations.

In reviewing the land use patterns and data, it is notable that Downtown Durham is not the retail center of the community, nor is it a residential center. Downtown has some major offices, but would not be considered the office center of Durham because of the existence of Research Triangle Park. Fortunately, unlike other comparable communities, Downtown Durham has retained City and County governmental functions.

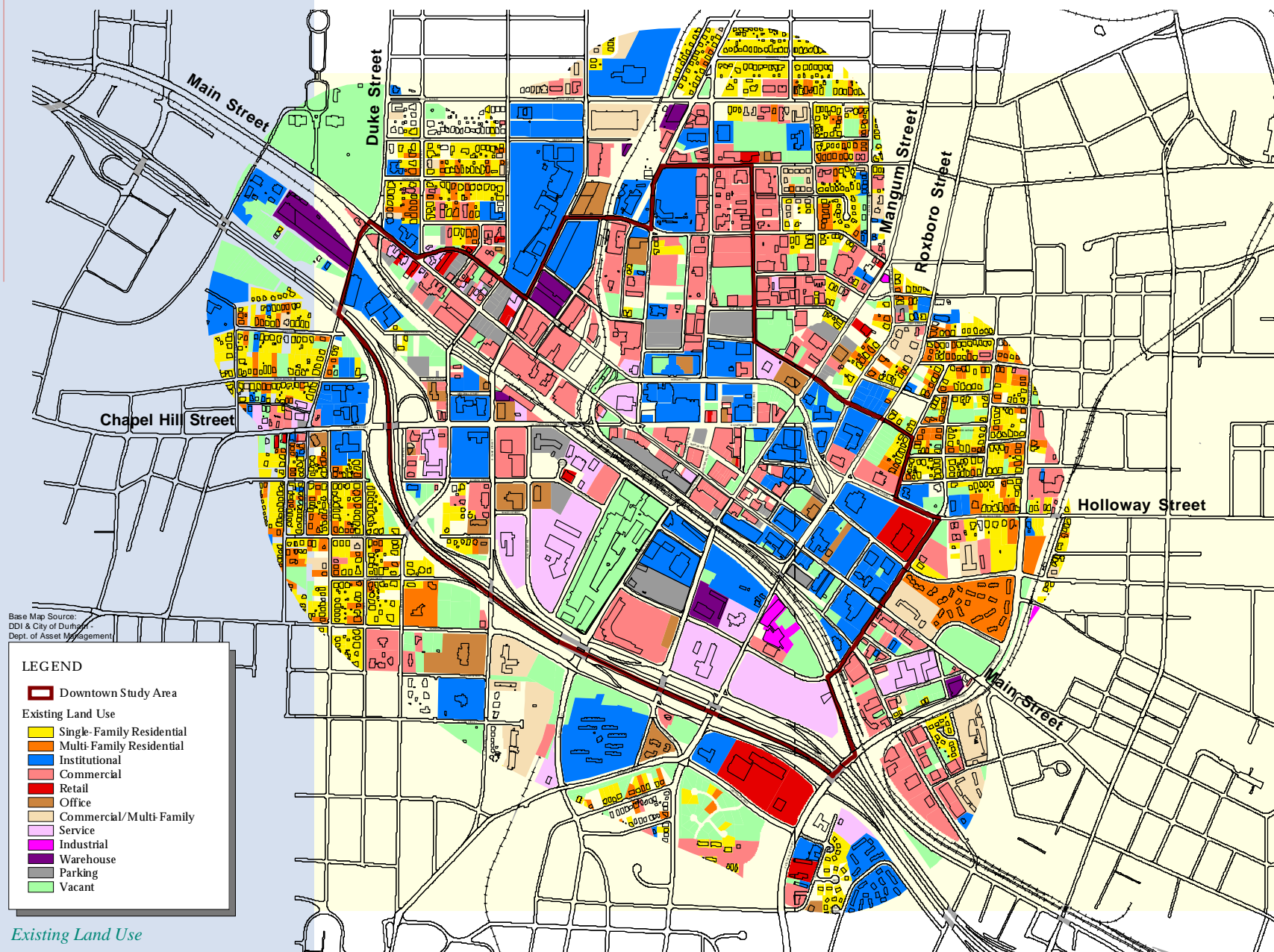
There are no fixed standards on the ideal mix of various uses by which to evaluate land use composition. Successful, vibrant Downtowns, however, boast multiple activity-center land uses. Typically, those Downtowns are the governmental centers, as well as the office, entertainment, retail, and/or housing center for their respective communities. At this time, Downtown Durham functions as the governmental center of the community and offers isolated entertainment nodes at Brightleaf Square, Carolina Theatre and the Durham Bulls Athletic Park.

"Cities change or they stagnate. But how they change-- how the rights of property are made to balance with the less tangible public interest-- is one mark of civilization."

- Bill Moyers

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Although Downtown does not yet have multiple activity centers, there are a number of reasons to be encouraged about Downtown Durham's future. A number of key development activities have recently occurred or are proposed in or adjacent to Downtown. A summary of these projects follows.

- **Durham Bulls Athletic Park/ Capitol Broadcasting** – The Durham Bulls baseball stadium and associated Diamond View office complex have injected new activity into the southern reaches of Downtown. With games by the Bulls and other teams occurring at least 60 days a year, some 400,000 people visit this important venue. The adjacent Diamond View office building has been equally successful and, in conjunction with the stadium, presents an attractive architectural element to the southern edge of Downtown.
- **Durham Multi-Modal Transportation Center** – The railroad corridor that bisects Downtown and that was the origin of Downtown development will once again be going through a transformation. Major upgrades along the rail corridor will transform it from a predominately freight line to a significant local and regional commuter line. To facilitate maximum transportation efficiency, a multi-modal complex is planned for the Walker Warehouse. This multi-modal complex will provide safe and efficient transfer between alternative transportation modes including bus, car, taxi, pedestrian and rail. While this expanded use of the rail corridor presents opportunity for Downtown, it also represents a significant challenge in linking the core area to areas south of the rail line.
- **Brightleaf Square** – Developed in the 1980's as an entertainment center, the redeveloped tobacco warehouses of Brightleaf provide architectural character to an active mixed-use district on the west end of Downtown. This original development has spawned several other commercial redevelopment opportunities in the west Main Street area, including the Blue Devil Ventures project.



Durham Bulls Athletic Park



Brightleaf Square



Walker Warehouse, the Durham Multi-Modal Transportation Center Site

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“Humankind has progressively discovered its intellectual and emotional wealth through the unpredictable encounters and confrontations made possible by life in the city.”

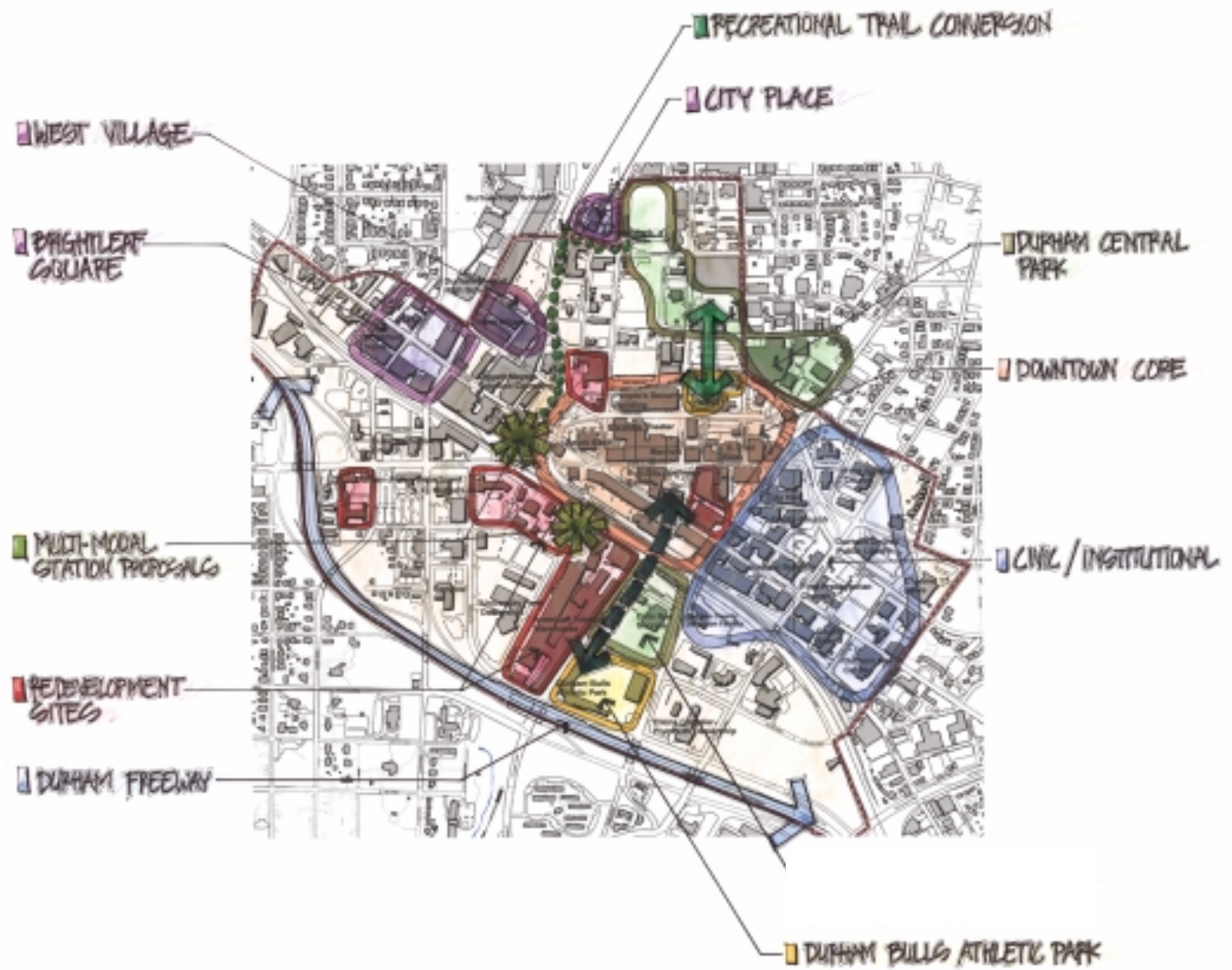
- Rene Dubos

- **Blue Devil Venture’s “West Village”** – To the north and east of Brightleaf Square, a private developer is in the process of converting several large former tobacco warehouse buildings into market rate housing. Upon completion, more than 247 units of housing will have been added to the Downtown housing inventory.
- **City Place** – Further north of Blue Devil Ventures, other small, yet characteristic, brick warehouses have been converted to office uses. This includes the offices of Measurement Inc. and the new City Place development.
- **Durham Central Park** – East of the warehouse conversions, an ambitious plan for open space, trails, artists’ stalls, and a farmers market is taking form. Known as “Durham Central Park,” this project brings much needed open space into the northern edge of Downtown and will serve as a transitional land use between the residential neighborhoods to the north and the higher density, mixed-use Downtown to the south.

Major Downtown Elements

The development activity represented by these recent commitments indicates a significant reversal of the trend of decreasing investment in Downtown. Interestingly, the majority of these initiatives capitalize upon unique elements of Downtown Durham’s architectural fabric. Other elements that significantly contribute to the existing character of Downtown include the Carolina Theatre, the Durham Arts Council, the Marriott Hotel and Civic Center convention facilities, as well as the City and County institutional uses. The diagram at right, *Existing Framework Analysis*, shows the current and/or proposed development activities and their relationships to one another.

In addition to the Framework Analysis diagram shown at right, the matrix shown on the following page, *Major Downtown Elements*, lists elements that can shape the success of any Downtown, and rates their current visibility within the existing fabric of Downtown Durham.



Existing Framework Analysis

“Design and planning, or lack of it, can make or break a city. Portland’s downtown has been saved because of planning and good design. . . Without the planning and design, the center of the city would have been deserted years ago.”

*- Mayor Bud Clark,
Portland, Oregon*

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Major Downtown Elements Downtown Durham, North Carolina

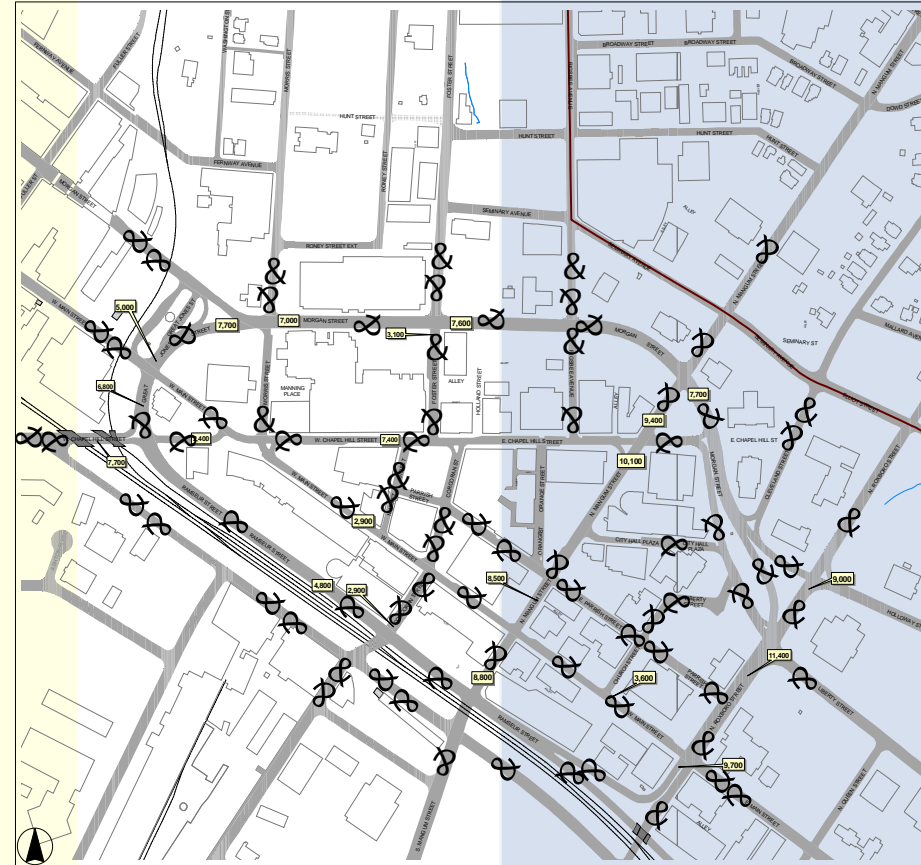
| Major Elements | Dominant | Apparent | Not Apparent |
|--|----------|----------|--------------|
| Landmarks | | .X | |
| Pedestrian Orientation & Scale | | .X | |
| Open/Public Space | | | .X |
| Defined Districts | | | .X |
| Historic Fabric | | .X | |
| Design Themes | | | .X |
| Destination Points | | .X | |
| Activity Centers | | .X | |
| Transit System | | .X | |
| Street-level Retail | | | .X |
| Arts & Culture | | .X | |
| Entertainment | | .X | |
| Recreation | | | .X |
| Major Institutional Presence | .X | | |
| Service Center | | | .X |
| Market Area | | | .X |
| Strong Linkages | | | .X |
| Education Presence | | | .X |
| Parking | | .X | |
| Entrepreneurialism | | .X | |
| Residential Base | | .X | |
| Urban Neighborhoods | | .X | |
| Business Core | | | .X |
| Ethnic Themes/Diversity | | | .X |
| Public/Private Agenda | | .X | |
| Economic Development Tools | | .X | |
| Smooth Traffic Network | | | .X |
| Hospitality Area | | .X | |
| Public/Civic Buildings | .X | | |
| Opportunities for Development | | .X | |

Circulation and Parking

No single element has had as much impact on the function and appearance of Downtown as the transportation circulation network. The street system in Downtown Durham has undergone significant change in the last 25 years. Originally, the street pattern was more of a conventional grid system; but, in the mid-1970s, the Downtown 'loop' was constructed to serve as a high capacity, higher speed bypass around the core area of Downtown. This was accomplished by converting the outlying thoroughfares to one-way, multi-lane boulevards and re-configuring their intersections to encourage free-flowing movement. Today, the result is a one-way, relatively high-speed circular network that is a physical barrier between Downtown subdistricts. This barrier is disorienting to both residents and visiting motorists.

While the 'loop' is often the initial target of criticism for Downtown's street network, the rest of the street system also contributes to circulation problems. The Roxboro and Mangum one-way north-south pairs bordering the eastern edge of Downtown and the next closest one-way pairs, Duke and Gregson bordering the western edge of Downtown, are approximately one mile from each other. Between the two, there is no continuous and direct north-south route through Downtown. This lack of a direct and functional north-south route through Downtown can be disorienting and contributes to the message repeated and reinforced throughout the master planning process that "it is too difficult to get around in Downtown."

Remedying this problem has been recognized as a priority by the City and the general public. As a result, a 1.2 million dollar bond issue for the realignment of Blackwell, Corcoran, and Foster Streets was approved by voters. This high-profile project will greatly improve north-south traffic circulation in Downtown.



Existing Traffic Counts and Circulation Patterns



Presently, east-west travel in Downtown is more efficient than north-south travel largely because there are more thoroughfares that provide such access. However, in the core area north of the railroad tracks, all of the east-west thoroughfares are one-way and are configured in an unconventional pattern. Main Street and Chapel Hill Street, major thoroughfares throughout the City, deteriorate to a one- and two-lane one-way pair, reversing their respective orientation, east of the landmark intersection currently known as Five Points. While Chapel Hill Street presently ends at Morgan Street, Main Street reverts to a two-way, four-lane street east of Roxboro Street. Since Main Street is currently one-way westbound within the 'loop', west Durham is essentially disconnected from east Durham because of the disrupted traffic flow along Main Street.

In terms of existing traffic operations, all of the Downtown streets appear to be operating under their capacity. This evaluation, based on 1997 Average Annual Daily Traffic for most of the critical streets within Downtown, used a combination of the North Carolina Department of Transportation methodology and a planning level analysis consistent with the Highway Capacity Manual, Special Report 209 (Transportation Research Board, 1997). This analysis considered factors such as signal spacing, operating speeds, facility type, peak hour directional splits, and on-street parking.

While on-street parking can negatively impact traffic circulation, it is desired and needed in Downtown Durham particularly to serve the retail market and other short-term parking needs. Many stakeholders have requested more on-street parking; however, on-street parking should be used to serve the short-term customer and never as a substitute for long-term parking. Within the last five years, the City has allowed free parking on-street, while virtually all off-street parking, for visitors or employees, is paid parking. Presently, most of the available public off-street parking is over-utilized, with most occupancy rates reaching well over 90 percent (85 percent utilization is the accepted norm for efficiency).



The 'loop,' looking west on Morgan Street



The 'loop,' looking north on Roxboro

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Other Downtown Dynamics

In addition to major existing Downtown elements, such as the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, institutional uses, Brightleaf Square, and the transportation network, there are other dynamics that influence the future of Downtown Durham. These dynamics, summarized in the *Visual Character Analysis* on the following page, relate to the following:

- **County Facilities Expansion** – Durham County officials have identified the need for expanded space. Committed to remaining in Downtown Durham in order to most efficiently serve its public, County officials have prepared programming estimates which show that 500,000 square feet will need to be constructed and/or acquired to house needed County departments. The magnitude of this space need, its associated work force, and its user patterns have significant potential to positively impact the Downtown area.
- **Rail Corridor** – The rail corridor that traverses current day Downtown Durham will soon undergo another transformation in its long history. As regional passenger commuting rail plans are implemented, this corridor represents both an opportunity and a constraint. Opportunities avail themselves by the sheer volume of potential users that can be brought into Downtown, while constraints are created by the physical presence of the rail infrastructure. Currently the rail corridor is at-grade and, in effect, divides Downtown. With the implementation of regional rail, it is projected that rail traffic will increase during peak morning and evening rush-hour traffic to one train through Downtown approximately every seven minutes. If provisions are not made to grade separate the rail corridor from north-south roadways, sections of Downtown could be cut off from one another during heavy commuting periods.



Durham County Justice Center



Rail Corridor south of Main Street



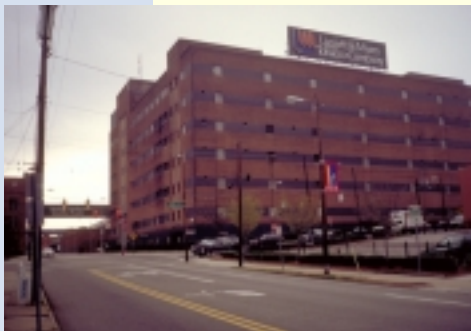
Visual Character Analysis

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American Tobacco Warehouse buildings



Liggett-Meyers complex on Main Street

- **American Tobacco Warehouse District** – Originally the epicenter of Durham's tobacco industry, the American Tobacco Warehouse District with its nearly 1 million square feet of significant architectural character, yet vacant, brick warehouses, represents a tremendous redevelopment opportunity for Downtown Durham. Located directly adjacent to Durham Bulls ballpark, this area has high visibility from both the Durham Freeway and the hundreds of thousands of annual visitors to the stadium.
- **Liggett-Myers** – The Liggett-Myers Tobacco complex can also be expected to undergo a tremendous transformation due to economic conditions and recent trends associated with the tobacco industry. Formidable in scale and character, the complex has inhibited connectivity between Brightleaf and the rest of Downtown. Liggett-Myers has announced plans to vacate a majority of this facility, which will offer significant square footage for major redevelopment.
- **East End** – While transition between areas surrounding Downtown has been established through land use or other edge treatments (such as the Durham Freeway), the relationship between Downtown and the east end is not well-defined. With current circulation patterns taking traffic one-way out of the east end of Downtown, and significant land clearance patterns, it is difficult to assess the function of the transitional area east of Roxboro. Part of future plans developed in Downtown must deal with the establishment of a mutually compatible relationship between Downtown and east end neighborhoods — one that provides activity and symbolizes the importance of the relationship between the two areas.

- **Historic Appeal** – Downtown Durham has a wonderful history and is fortunate to have many structures that effectively document its history. At present, however, the physical storytelling of Downtown Durham's history is lacking. There is no evidence, other than the existence of buildings in varying degrees of disrepair, of Durham's fascinating tobacco industry history or its famous "Black Wall Street." This history is not only unique to Durham, it is of national significance. It is a story that separates Durham from other cities, and it should play a large role in future development activities.
- **Physical Fabric** - Similar to the depth of its history, Durham has a physical uniqueness that should direct future redevelopment and revitalization. Examples of unique architecture, such as the tobacco warehouses, and stunning viewsheds of certain structures, such as the one found looking north on Church Street to Trinity Church, are elements that form the physical fabric of Durham. These elements deserve to be highlighted and celebrated. In addition, Durham's network of streets has an intimacy as a result of their scale and pattern. This irregularity has complicated vehicular circulation, but it has also provided opportunities for the creation of remarkable and charming pedestrian corridors. These opportunities could be capitalized upon through more dynamic support of preservation policies, design standards, and streetscape enhancements in order to reinforce the true character of Downtown Durham.



Original Durham Bulls Athletic Park



View towards the CCB Tower



View up Church St. to Trinity Church